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The Political Circuit

Cuba Critics Losing Steam

By ROBERT HEALY
(Political Editor)

WASHINGTON—The administration has taken some of the partisan steam out of the Cuban issue. Not that there is any solution to the problem that dogs the Kennedy administration.



HEALY

But it was obvious Thursday from the tone of the talk by Sen. Keating (R-N.Y.), the administration's most severe critic on Cuba, that the partisan heat of the Cuban issue has been lowered several degrees.

Keating was moderate, even sometimes gentle, in his criticism. The harshest thing he had to say was that President Kennedy failed to communicate his policy on Cuba to the Congress and the public. And he added that the government was as much puzzled about Cuba as is the public.

What was billed as the great dialogue between the two opposing forces sputtered out here Thursday afternoon when Keating gave his pitch first to the newspaper editors of the nation and then he was followed to the rostrum by Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

But the real tipoff came before Rusk began to speak. On Capitol Hill Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield complimented Keating on the tone of his remarks before the editors.

Thursday's event was no accident.

The administration has been working to cool the partisan fires on Cuba for some time now.

At first it was suggested that the Kennedy administration publish a White Paper on Cuba in which it would answer clearly all its critics.

The White Paper was drafted and after several efforts the President finally rejected the idea.

Instead, another plan was followed. It was to take individual critics into camp, listen appreciatively to their suggestions and send them away smiling.

This was done. One of the State Department's specialists

on Cuban affairs, Robert Fulwider, backed much of the job.

But in the case of the administration's most effective critic, Sen. Keating, he was given the full treatment. He was briefed with both Central Intelligence Director John McCone and Secretary of State Rusk. If he had to sit down with the President, as some have suggested, there has been no mention made of it.

About these meetings Keating was very generous. He said that some of the measures he had recommended to the administration leaders have been put into effect, though not all of them. He said for this much he commended the administration.

But it was not all hearts and flowers for the Kennedy administration. Keating said that unless the United States Government has some long-term program to dislodge the Soviets from Cuba then the Congress and the country will have nothing to support.

His principal thrust against the administration was that they had deceived the public in the early days of the Soviet buildup.

And he charged that there had been no substantial reduction in the 17,000 Soviet personnel in Cuba.

His sharpest needle came when he said that the administration referred to these Soviet personnel as technicians when they entered Cuba and troops when they pulled out.



SEN. KEATING

But this over-all was a mild line for Keating. He made it clear that he did not favor an invasion of Cuba to dislodge Fidel Castro. Nor was he in favor of using U.S. bases as a launching spot for hit-and-run raids by Cuban brigades on Soviet shipping. His tone was a good deal more moderate than that of Gov. Rockefeller of New York who came down here last week and dropped a broadside that possibly there were secret communications between Premier Khrushchev and President Kennedy on Cuba that have not been revealed. Rockefeller even suggested appeasement in the Kennedy Cuban policy.

But after the New York governor left town he was roundly whacked by columnists for his vague suggestions of appeasement and secret communications.

Keating moved far away from the Rockefeller pitch.

Rusk, who was slated to answer the New York senator's charges, was equally as mild. He said that the Soviet presence in Cuba was not accepted as a normal state of affairs for the island. But when he was asked how long it would be before the abnormal became normal, he would put no time limit on it.

He said his department welcomed honest criticism and he found in his work with Congress that there was little partisan effort and much more common purpose.

But he couldn't resist reminding Keating (without mentioning him by name, of course) that both parties were joint stockholders in the unfinished business of such areas as Viet Nam, Laos, and Cuba.

Remember, said Rusk, these problems did not all start in 1961. As Rusk said earlier, 90 percent of the business was done in 1950 and 1951. The other 10 percent was done in 1952 and 1953.

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DEAN RUSK